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ABSTRACT

This paper is addressed to administrators and evaluators in school districts which are initiating bilingual education programs in compliance with a U.S. Supreme Court decision. Major evaluation problems are described and remedies suggested. Each step in the sequence, from needs assessment through final report, is discussed and illustrated. The objective is to share Milwaukee's long experience (since 1969) in bilingual program evaluation with other districts, and to forearm by forewarning. (Author)

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"BILINGUAL PROGRAM EVALUATION: PROCESSES AND PROBLEMS"

Barbara H. Bortin

Many states have mandated bilingual/bicultural education programs in school districts having a minimum number of non-English-dominant pupils. These laws require little reporting. However, districts which apply for federal funding must write a proposal which includes an evaluation plan. If accepted, the evaluation plan will have to be implemented, from selection of participants through data collection and reporting. Ah, there's the rub! Many are the pitfalls between proposal and report. My purpose is to fore-arm researchers new to bilingual evaluation by describing problems encountered since 1969 in the evaluation of Milwaukee's Title VII Bilingual/Bicultural Education Program. I will take you quickly through the typical evaluation steps and point out these characteristics of each: the Ideal situation, the Reality, and some Problems which result because of the discrepancy between ideal and real. I will then humbly advise you of a Saving Grace and a Remedy.

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1) Needs, Proposal, and Evaluation Design

The first steps deal with a needs analysis, the establishment of goals and objectives, and the writing of a proposal. Ideally, the goals and objectives represent a consensus of parents and teachers, arrived at through lengthy study and discussion. In Reality, the proposal deadline often requires a

hasty effort to describe innovative courses of study which have scarcely advanced beyond the idea stage. The evaluator encounters his first Problem here for the proposal must include an evaluation plan and timeline, yet assessment instruments have not been located or developed. An evaluation plan conceived in haste and a timeline developed without knowledge of course content just won't work. The Saving Grace is that the discrepancy disappears once the Remedy has been applied. The Remedy is modification of the evaluation design and timeline by post-proposal conferences with supervisors and teachers.

2) Selection of Participants

The pupil population is the evaluator's basic concern in trying to determine the effect of an innovative program. Ideally, pupils who wish a bilingual education would be randomly assigned to program and non-program classes. In Reality, all eligible applicants are enrolled. This creates a Problem in drawing comparison groups. Where eligible pupils are not enrolled, the comparison group is unlike the treatment group in its support of bilingual education and often contains a larger proportion of English-dominant pupils. These situations force extra caution in drawing inferences from the results of comparative data analyses. The Saving Grace is that longitudinal data within the program group reveal learning patterns of value in curriculum planning. The only Remedy I can envision would be funding guidelines mandating the controlled studies which cannot be required within local school system political realities. No one wants to deny a pupil the opportunity to enroll in an educational program.

3) Identification of Dominant Language

The pupil's first language is used as a bridge to teaching the second language, to develop readiness and reading skills, and to teach subject content. With monolinguals, first language identification is no problem. However, many bilinguals interchange languages to the extent that the teacher cannot clearly identify the dominant language. Ideally, there would be tests of language dominance at all grade levels. In Reality, most valid instruments have been normed on kindergarten and first-grade pupils. The Problem is that, beyond the age of six, language dominance is a matter of teacher judgment and subject to error in the case of bilingual children. The Saving Grace is that most bilingual/bicultural teachers have uncommon perception for identification of the dominant language. The Remedy is development of valid instruments extending the norms beyond early childhood.

4) Instrumentation

In a developmental program, students are taught all subject content in two languages from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Ideally, there would be an available pool of standardized achievement tests with equivalent English/Spanish forms. Actually, such test development has been limited. One must use local or published translations of English tests. In either case, editing is necessary because of vocabulary differences among the Spanish-speaking nations. Lack of time for local test construction and validation and the absence of large normative or comparison groups are the Problems. The Saving Grace is that Remedies for Spanish reading are being developed via New York City's

"Language Assessment Batteries", SRA's "Sober Español", and Dr. Oscar Ozete's Tests of Spanish Reading Comprehension. Phi Delta Kappa has developed various Spanish/English achievement tests for Grades 7 to 12. In most other curriculum areas, the Problem is with us but the Saving Grace and Remedy have yet to appear.

5) Monitoring

Ideally, pupil progress would be assessed periodically in both languages. Development of a monitoring system from Kindergarten through Grade 12 in two languages in several schools is a Problem. The Reality is that systematic monitoring is not possible without one or more full-time evaluators.

In a monitoring system, the greatest Problems are teacher resistance to the time and paperwork involved and the perceived threat of the monitor process. A Saving Grace is that teachers learn much about their pupils through testing, and supervisors can pinpoint areas where assistance with program planning is needed. The Remedy for monitoring problems appears to lie in improving the system over time and in experiencing its benefits.

6) Surveys

Students, staff, administrators, parents, and community are surveyed annually. Their suggestions are solicited for use in planning a more effective program. Student and staff response is good. Ideally, parent/community

response would also be high. In Reality, these groups have a low rate of return. The Problem is that parent/community input is given great weight in program planning but the input is based on a small representation of the population. There is no Saving Grace for lack of parent input. A Remedy may lie in the establishment of a parent/community group to work with the evaluator to encourage greater parent/community response.

7) Data Processing

Ideally, assessment instruments would be scored electronically and analyzed by computer. Actually, the pupil population is too small and the evaluation design too complex for investment in much computer processing. Most of the work is done by hand using a desk calculator. The Problem here is operator error which must be closely monitored. The Saving Grace is limited assistance by data processing personnel. The Remedy would be additional secretarial, programmer, and computer time, all unlikely at this point.

8) Data Analysis

Ideally, comparisons could be made between large program and comparison groups. Actually, the comparison population is small. Frequently, data need to be analyzed according to language dominance (e.g., performance on a test of English reading) which results in very small groups nested within a class or grade level. The resulting Problem is the difficulty of achieving confidence in the interpretation of results. The Saving Grace is that a longitudinal

study can reveal trends over time. The Remedies would appear to be random assignment of pupils to treatment and control groups and the pooling of data from several schools as the program expands.

9) Annual Report

Ideally, the content of the annual evaluation report would be a factor in program planning, proposal writing, and funding. The Reality is that planning, proposal writing, and funding precede posttesting, data analysis, and report writing. The Problem is that sometimes evaluation outcomes signal a need to change direction in program planning; for example, the development of alternative curricula for students whose reading does not improve as a result of enrollment in the Bilingual Reading Center. A Saving Grace is the fact that the findings result in eventual action but it seems a loss of precious time for which there seems to be no Remedy.

10) Language

Ideally, the evaluator, like the staff, should be a linguist. In Reality, few researchers are bilingual. Neither are we experts in any of the other academic disciplines with which we work. Rather, armed with some knowledge about learning, human behavior, and statistical techniques we, like Renaissance Man, absorb much of what we work with. Our initial naivete would be a certain problem had we not the Saving Grace of cooperative educators to work with. Bilingual staff members provide a Saving Grace by willingly lending their

expertise to the evaluator. The training of bilingual evaluation specialists is the Remedy.

Ten processes and a series of problems have been itemized. Most of the processes, but only a sample of problems, were identified. Our Research Department Director, Dwight Rowe, defines a problem as "an opportunity". May you be blessed with many a Saving Grace and Remedy for the Problems which will be your opportunity in evaluating bilingual programs.